

This is Neil Flindall interviewing Mr. Roy Renshaw, in his home at 1387 Niagara Boulevard, Fort Erie, Ontario, on the Thirty-first day of July 1985.

N.F: Were you born in Fort Erie?

R.R: No, I was born in Caledonia, Ontario, around the Grand River, 1915, July the twenty-fifth, I moved to Fort Erie along with my family in 1916, as my father got a job on the Canadian National Railroad down here...my first home was on Phipps Street at a person's name of Young and he was a baseball player in Fort Erie, from there I moved to Phipps Street...I don't know who is living in the present house now but it was...five or six houses up from Central...on the south side of the street, where we lived they had a rug factory in the back, can't think of who the gentleman was...but he would buy up felt hats and weave mats for your doorsteps or whatever type of mat you wanted...from there my father bought a house at 241 Emerick which was just east of the school yard on Emerick Avenue, and I lived there until I got married in 1936...now some of our oldest neighbours were Ben Young, and Mr. Noyes, Mr. Bob Beyers, Mr Putney, Mr. Crooks, Mr. Hersey who was tied up with the first water works in Crescent Beach...him and his brother had a water plant at Crescent Park...there was a gentleman of the name of Mr. Clarke at the southeast corner of Central and Emerick who had eight cows...and I used to take those eight cows, and take them out to pasture where the Rio Vista Golf Course is today, and then bring them home at night...there was another fellow across the road from my dad's house, his name was Nettle, and he had cows, and he pastured them between Emerick Avenue and Highland Avenue, on the pasture right there:

N.F: That is quite a bit different than it is today.

R.R: Of course I went to school at the Phipp's Street School, and also I attended one year of High School, here in Fort Erie...in 1936 I got married and in 1939 I took the job as, on the Town of Fort Erie, and I worked there for forty-two years.

N.F: I knew it was a long time, forty-two years certainly is.

R.R: Yes, how's that!

N.F: What did you start doing for the town?

R.R: My first job on the town was on Central Avenue between Highland and the Bowen road...putting in a four inch water line...which I thought was a monster of a water line.

N.F: I bet it was for that time.

R.R: Yes, we all had a section...a taped out section...to dig, and when we were finished that, that was our day's work...coincidentally when I started digging I found a big boulder, in my section, and I called the boss over who was Mr. Doug Finelson, and I said, "Doug, what am I going to do with that boulder?", and he says, "Bury it", and I said "Bury it?" and he said "Yes, dig down underneath it, till it falls in the trench and leave it there" and that's exactly what I done with it.

N.F: Is that right, and this is all in one day's work?

R.R: All in a day's work, that's right...that was my first job...that was my first job on the town...later on I became a truck driver and then I became a foreman, then I took over from Bridgeburg, and over Fort Erie, the south end, I took over the whole thing, and then I became a superintendent, from then on I was supervisor...now I can remember, as for...as my job went...a tank across from our City Hall on Jarvis Street, a water tank, which they called a stand pipe, it started at the ground the same size, and went quite a ways up into the air, the same size, that's where Fort Erie stored it's first tank of water...now when we were kids, before I had the job, on the Town of Fort Erie we used to climb up on top of that, because it had a walkway around it...with a railing...and we would get up on the top of that...and you went up a ladder, and as you got up, and got off a section of the ladder it was taken up by spring, ten or fifteen feet higher than the ground so the kids couldn't reach it...but of course we'd get a pipe-pull and pull it down...so the Police Chief was Andy Griffin, and he would come over and get his club out and he'd wave it at us, and tell us to come on back down, and we'd say no, you come on up and get us...and of course he never would come and get us, ha, ha...now that was taken down by Archie

McGlashen, you remember Archie McGlashen...and sold for scrap during the Second World War...anyway Archie McGlashen started up a coal yard at the bottom of Jarvis, over where the gasoline station is, on the east side of the Boulevard there...and that was put in there they brought two scows...and they put one north and south...and the other one east and west...and tied them down, filled them full of big stones and sunk them, and that's how they made that piece of property in there.

N.F: So that's how that was done.

R.R: Yes, and then they brought a railroad track down in there...the rails would be still under the Boulevard, if you were to dig that section of the Boulevard up...and they used to bring big loads of scrap iron and coal of all kinds...and one particular time they brought in wagon wheels, where they came from I don't know...but thousands and thousands of wagon wheels, burnt the spokes out of them and salvaged the iron...tons and tons of it.

N.F: Is that right.

R.R: What fascinated me was...they would drop a lot of it in the water and of course we would dive down and try to bring it up...but no way could you bring it up...later on they got a magnetic thing, on a crane and put it down in the water and picked up all that scrap up out of there and got rid of that too.

N.F: That's quite the idea, I never knew anything about that.

R.R: All right, now what else...do you remember where the first theatre was in Fort Erie?

N.F: No.

R.R: It was on Dufferin Street, and Don Dean owns the property now... okay...and there was a building there, at first it was the Anglican Sunday School...then they sold it to Ziff's...and they made the Bellard Theatre out of it...remember that now...now under that theatre, they dug a well in an eight inch diameter casing and they went down I don't know how many feet, but quite a number of feet...and the bit dropped ten feet and then hit solid rock again...there is ten feet of water underneath there, like a river...which is forty degrees colder than the water in Fort Erie in the middle of the summer time.

N.F: Forty degrees colder?

R.R: And I tried to talk our City Council into buying that piece of property pumping that water into our system, and using it...they wouldn't do it...but I told Don Dean that the well is there, and he's looked for it, now whether he found it or not, I don't know.

N.F: Isn't that something.

R.R: When they bought the show we moved down on Klauck Street where the bowling alley is...there was a church on that corner, and a Markel Electric factory on that corner, facing Courtwright Street...right where the bowling alley is...now that burned down...and the gentleman who was the president or something or the owner of the factory that Markel Electric...he went down there one evening checking... and he went down stairs, and he lit a match...and he was blown clear across the street...it was full of gas, it blew right up, and then it all burned down...now Markel Electric was burned three times here in Fort Erie, three times...they moved from there up Courtwright Street to where Grau's, is it Grau's is, okay...they were in there for a while, and then they moved over on Lewis Street where Harber has that loading and storage, they moved over there, that's the last I remember them.

N.F: They went through quite a bit.

R.R: Well, there's a lot of things if you could ask me it would probably come to my mind.

N.F: What happened to the church that was in that area?

R.R: They built that little church at the corner of Central and Emerick, that little old place they just tore it down...and we attended Sunday School there...and then of course they sold that to the Presbyterian Church and we all moved up to the big church on the hill there by Gilmore...now the Old Fort was all rebuilt since I've been in Fort Erie...I can remember when Jarvis Street was mud.

N.F: Is that right.

R.R: It was the business area...but it was a mud street and instead of stoning it they got cinders, from the railroad and put cinders on the roads...there was a big hole it would be on the west side of Klauck

Street and Jarvis, on the north side of Jarvis...there was a big hole there...all the kids in town would go down there sleigh riding and skiing down into that big hole, on the top of the bank there was a little wee two-by-four shanty it was the only shoe maker in Fort Erie and evidently he owned that property at the time and he would fix your shoes while you waited.

N.F: Imagine that.

R.R: Now old people on Jarvis Street...there was a bake shop, I can't think of her name, she just died, out here at Sourwines' place not too long ago, ninety some odd years old, can't think of her name... there was Kraft Cheese, my aunt worked for Kraft on Jarvis Street... there was Dickie White who had a butcher shop...there was Morely Spratt, who had a butcher shop...there was George Bowen who run the Dominion Store...there was a Chinese Laundry the name of Pong, there was two Chinese Restaurants one was the Bridgeburg Cafe and I don't know what the other name was Skippy Wong's across the road...there was three sisters across from the Town Hall that had a piano shop, right next to where the fire hall is, they sold pianos, I don't know what their names were, I can't think of their names... there was Phytes who was on the corner of Jarvis and Central, on the southeast corner, that's where everybody bought their paper... across the road from that was Bart Purpura, that's the old, old gentleman I'm talking about, he had a fruit stand there and after him Mrs. Girard had a restaurant there okay...that's where Glenny is situated now...something else I must tell you, my father-in-law helped build the Town Hall, he was a brick-layer, after he went back to Brampton, that's my wife's step-father, of course the Bell Telephone Company was there and there was Ditchburn's Hardware Store there...and of course the Barnea House, which was always in behind there...and the Royal Bank, there was a J. R. Steele run the Royal Bank, and he used to take the pay to the railroad in a bag in one hand...and a thirty-eight revolver in the other...and he would walk up to the yard office and pay the men off, yes I can remember that just as clear as crystal.

N.F: I have never heard about that.

R.R: Now we had a ball team...a ball team in Fort Erie called the Mentholatums they were crackerjacks...we would have a ball game on Saturday on the Bowen Road ballpark, right where it is now, there was a big grandstand there...big wooden grandstand yes, everything was there...as a matter of fact I was the bat boy...for the team...now when they would have a ball game they would close the town down... the stores would close...everything would close, especially on the twenty-fourth of May, or a holiday, the first of July...they would have popcorn stands and fluffy stands, the fluffy stuff you eat, they would buy a pig...and they would snowfence an area off, and grease the pig, and have all the children go in there and try to catch that greased pig...and two or three times it was caught... and Bart Purpura would buy it back again for five dollars, and turn it loose again for the kids to chase it some more, many a time... but when they had a ball game, they were champs by the way but I don't know what year, but they would go all over...to Caledonia, into Dunnville, wherever there was another ball team they would go, and the Mentholatum Company of Fort Erie sponsored that ball team, they would wear straw hats...all the men would wear straw hats, and if they won the ball game nobody went home with a straw hat...because they pulled them down over their ears, yes more fun than anything, it was just grand...now that old grandstand is all gone and there's nothing but just a small ball field.

N.F: You'd never know to look at it now.

R.R: All those streets were cinder streets then.

N.F: That's hard to imagine too.

R.R: Yes, now, going away back to when I was quite young the first pumping station if Fort Erie was operated by natural gas...just like you burn in your stove, and it was at the corner of...well it was this side of the International Bridge, right on that corner of Courtwright Street right in there, the old well everything is there yet...just across the road...and they pumped water up the tank up where the Humane Society is, the big tank was up in there for the Michigan Central to water their engines, of course the only thing left now would

be the underground main, which was an eight inch water main and the old well which was outside the road but it's still there, of course we filled it up with stone and all that, now I don't know what happened to the machinery...but I got a hold of the first hydrant that was ever put in Fort Erie and if you want to see it, it's over at the Train Station...that hydrant over there is the first hydrant that was ever installed in the town of Fort Erie, that was on that line, yes and I donated it to the people at the train.

N.F: That was really a great thing to do.

R.R: Now, where was the first garbage dump in Fort Erie?

N.F: I would have no idea.

R.R: The first garbage dump in Fort Erie was behind or east of the Greenwood Cemetery...between the cemetery and the creek, all the garbage was put in there for years and years and years, until the government came in and said no more, no more garbage in there, people are complaining because it was full of rats and things and they had to move out of there and they went from there they went over on Dunlop Street...they filled that place up until they got kicked out of there and then they joined with Bertie Township...now do you remember the roundhouses...the Michigan Central was located at the top of Jarvis Street between the tracks there and Phipps Street... a great big roundhouse, because I used to go there and read the water meter all the time...which is another subject, the town likes to talk about often...and of course Erie Beach...Erie Beach was a beautiful place, and it was crowded, of course all the young boys in Fort Erie used to chase the girls, up at the beach, and we all had bicycles and we would race that little Peanut Train that's what they called it the Peanut Train from the Ferry Dock it started at the dock and went to Erie Beach and we would race it up the Lakeshore Road on our bicycles trying to beat it up there, sometimes we could and sometimes we couldn't, ha ha, of course the Ferry Boat went from Gene Aggrette's place his store across to the bottom of Ferry Street in Buffalo, you could ride that for five cents and on the weekends they would have a band or somebody would play a guitar or somebody

would sing old songs...it was a beautiful trip just to spend five cents and ride over and ride back again, just to listen to them and of course they'd pass the hat and what ever but my wife and I when we were first married we went over quite often there were some beautiful places to go for fish dinners...and you could buy for seven dollars you couldn't bring the...carry the groceries home...and by the way I worked on the boat nights as a deck hand, yes, for Patti Fix...he was the owner of the Ferry or the captain at that time...I don't know if he owned it or not but he was captain...I don't know what else I can tell you...I think of things as I go along.

N.F: Did you know Doctor Douglas?

R.R: Yes, I did...not too long, but I did know him, he was a wonderful man, he certainly was he had his house at the bottom of Bertie Street in there and he had an apple orchard in there how I remember is he sold the property to the government and they put the first Post Office in the south end was in Barney Ziff's building right there next to the Bank of Montreal.

N.F: I didn't know that either.

R.R: We put in the sewer and water and that's how I know.

N.F: When did the water mains and fire hydrants start in the north and south end?

R.R: Well as they renewed streets and started building houses they would put a new main up and supposedly a hydrant every five hundred feet.

N.F: That's how that was worked then.

R.R: But some of those hydrants are quite old they would be way back in 1928.

N.F: That's when the first ones went through?

R.R: Yes, and the sewers too...well there are still some of the manholes in Fort Erie that are original and they have the dates on them...and I think that you'll find that some of them have the date 1923 or 1928 on them.

N.F: And that would link up the fire hydrants as well?

R.R: Yes, the first time I had to do with the water works like...there

was an old fellow by the name of Mr. Hubbard who I believe he has Ted Rose's wife Ida, that would be her father...he was operator of the north end pump house...that's the first I had connection I had there then, of course her husband Ted worked there all his life, till he was moved up to the south end when we closed this one down and put a diesel in there, I guess the diesel is still there...and my first job, the first job I had after I got married in 1936 was for a little grocery store over on Jeanette Street by the name of Mr. Joseph...I used to have a nineteen twenty-nine or nineteen thirty car and I delivered fresh vegetables...went around and took orders then I took them the next day, that was my first job before I got onto the city or the town...I remember the arena caving in, the roof and that...in behind that arena at the time there was a fellow by the name of Vasey who had an ice plant...he owned the ice plant and after the arena went down he never rebuilt it up again...he never bothered with it...he wanted to sell it to the town, of course things as the years went by things improved and they got better equipment and they put their own ice plant right in the arena...but before he made ice and sold it for the town...and of course John Atwood he was a big shot of the town...I might get in trouble for this...but anyway you had to go to him even if you wanted a job, you had to go, Mr. Atwood he was the one you had to see about it...a job...now a funny thing happened while I was working for the town of Fort Erie...years ago if you had the measles or scarlet fever or small pox or something they had a placard made to tell you that you can't go in there because they had the measles or they had scarlet fever, and I was the one who was designated to nail those on your home...if the office directed me to do so...so this particular day they gave me the mayor's home by mistake...and of course I had it in black and white, and I said well up it goes, and I went down on Forsyth Street, and I nailed the scarlet fever sign on mayor Hawley's house...and the next day of course I got called in and I got nailed over the carpet...and I said well take a look at this...and I showed him the orders from the Town Hall, and he looked at it and he said

"Thank you...I was going to take your ears off, young man, but, I'll take somebody else's head off instead" and I got away with that, we've had some very good mayor's in the Town of Fort Erie, and some good councilmen, we had Mr. Malcom who was a judge, he was mayor, you know Drum Hall, who was an umpire for ball games, his father was mayor for a while...Jack Dailey's father was mayor for a while...and of course you know Jack Teal was mayor for a while...Mrs. Ziff and Mr. Ziff...and of course Mr. Hawley, that's the one I pretty near got into trouble with...and I think Mr. Atwood was at one time the Reeve, they had a Reeve before they had a mayor and of course there were quite a few Reeves, there was Bill Duncan...was Reeve at one time and Atwood and I can't recall all of them.

N.F: There would have been a lot over the years.

R.R: And years ago when I look at what sand and gravel and salt they've put on the earth by the thousands and thousands of tons, I don't remember how much it is yearly now...we used to have a half-ton truck...and we'd go on the railroad and get it full of cinders...and that lasted all winter.

N.F: Did it really?

R.R: That's what we used to sand the streets with...one half-ton truck of cinders.

N.F: There is a lot of difference there.

R.R: That shows you the change in time between then and today...years ago they had one girl in the town office...one girl and one clerk... a town clerk...that would be Mr. Tait, you remember Bill Tait, old Mr. Tait not young Bill...he was the clerk and he had one girl in the office...and they run the whole works...paid your taxes there and paid your water bill, and your dog taxes...when I took over my job as superintendent of the town of Fort Erie I took over the water, the sewers, the streets, the humane society part of it...we had no humane society in Fort Erie when there was a dead dog or a dog to be destroyed or anything that was my job to do it...and I even had to oversee digging the graves, which I didn't like...but I did it...my wife just said to me after you called me I don't know how

you did it...I just don't know how.

N.F: And still get some sleep as well.

R.R: We used to have a nice big flag pole on the town hall...right on the front of the town hall...and there always was a flag there, and they'd take it up in the morning and bring it down at night...the ropes come right down to the bottom you know...and I was the only one who would shinny up that when it got stuck...and I'd do it.

N.F: That's one thing I could never do.

R.R: Yes it was really something...a lot of the things I've done, I couldn't do them now...had lots of experiences with the town, lots of them...broken water mains in the middle of the night, sixteen inch pipes blown up...but I had it pretty good in those days, because instead of an answering system that they have now...I had the police department, and when I'd have a broken water main or something wrong the police department would call me up and I would ask them kindly would you stay there until I get there...because I don't know what's happened underneath the ground and I don't know how big the hole is, if you'll just stay there till I get there and I'll take over...and they were very good, they used to stay right there with me until I got control of things and then they'd leave me...but not today...that's not their job.

N.F: It must be pretty hard to just get a block number or something.

R.R: Well people call this emergency number now and they take care of it from there you know.

N.F: Or try to.

R.R: Or try to...that's true...oh, there was sometimes when we...I remember one valve for instance at the corner of Russell and Jeanette Streets...I looked for it for ten years before I found it.

N.F: Really.

R.R: And it was on the opposite side of the street to where it was supposed to be...you see earlier they had no maps or anything...some of the streets they had pretty good maps...and others they didn't...can you remember the shipyard...down where the marina is...they used to build ships there you know...as a matter of fact Mr. Sampson,

J. R. or J. A. I don't know which was the boss before me, the superintendent before I took over...he was a shipbuilder and I believe somewhere I've still got his books...how many rivets he used, how many men he had working on a job.

N.F: It must have been busy down there.

R.R: Oh, it was something else and we of course when there was a snowstorm then and Jarvis Street got cleaned out we done it all by hand...we did all our digging by hand...when we'd fix a water main break we'd use a pick and shovel...not two men standing up watching a digger dig...it wasn't like it is now...and sometimes you'd dig three or four holes before you'd find exactly where the main was broken.

N.F: I can easily imagine that, and I suppose people were in the same hurry then that they are in now.

R.R: Well then, way back when I first started to work there was only one policeman in Fort Erie there was only one chief...Andy Griffin, then he hired Chirp Mathews...then of course Chirp became Chief and even before Andy Griffin there was a guy by the name of Tom Nigh who was the caretaker of Phipps Street School and he was the Constable of Fort Erie at the same time...Bridgeburg, I'm sorry not Fort Erie, that wasn't part of Fort Erie then...and there used to be Bridgeburg, Fort Erie, and Amigari, and they all had their own fire departments.

N.F: All three did have their own fire departments?

R.R: Yes, Amigari had a little wee shack...the first one on your right hand side after you leave Jeanette Street going up around the corner...on the bend that little house that sitting there...that was the Fire Hall...it's still there today, yes.

N.F: I certainly didn't know that.

R.R: Garbage was picked up by Lenny Jackson with a team of horses...and I don't know what the contract was, how much it was...but it was peanuts to what it is now of course...it costs a fortune for garbage pick up now...there was him and Belltrami, you remember George Belltrami and there was...Gill, Mr. Gill down on, he had his

horses behind his barbershop on Jarvis Street he had a barn at the back there and he had horses in there and he used to pick up garbage too...but I can remember when Fort Erie had a team of horses to draw the fire thing...and Frank Benner was the one who had the horses right up on Dufferin Street there...right close to where, next door to where Don Dean has his shop, where that body shop is...right in there somewheres he had the two horses and oh, they were beautiful horses.

N.F: Where was the fire house itself then at that time?

R.R: It was in the Town Hall at the north end of the town hall, in that section where Mr. Kendrick is now...that's where the equipment was kept right there...there was two big doors there, and that's where it was.

N.F: The fire departments certainly have changed then.

R.R: Oh, for sure yes, how many have they got now...you've got six all together with Crystal Beach and Stevensville.

N.F: Then when you first started you worked for Bridgeburg itself?

R.R: Yes.

N.F: And then eventually everything came together.

R.R: Yes, everything was amalgamated, the two towns and then amalgamation with Bertie...yes I went through all that.

N.F: Was it popular the idea of the first amalgamation?

R.R: Well, as much as could be...yes but there was the odd person who didn't want it and there is still is people who resent it...such as that Ridgeway Station that was brought down to Fort Erie and left here in Bridgeburg as we call it...a lot of people in Ridgeway, the older people didn't want that, they wanted no part of that, they wanted it to stay in Ridgeway...yes and theres lots of things that people nowadays in Fort Erie they ignore it and they don't see it...and I suppose in those days we didn't see it either...such as they had guards on the International Bridge at one time when the war was on...yes, so that no aliens could cross over at that place...and then...there was bootlegging days in Fort Erie...and one of them was our former mayor Herb Guess...anyway the liquor and the beer

would come in in freight cars and it was placed where Benner's Coal Dock was on Courtwright Street and it was taken from there by wagon or cart or something down to the bottom of Dufferin or Jarvis or one of them...and shot down a chute, like a coal chute, an actual chute...they'd slide it down there and load it on the boats and of course it was destined for Cuba...well our Customs in Fort Erie they knew all this was going on...and they made out papers they had papers just as if it was a legal thing all together...but once that liquor or beer left the Canadian shore...they couldn't bring it back...they couldn't bring it back, they either had to dump it overboard, which of course the kids all used to dive for...or get rid of it somehow.

N.F: They could not bring it back to shore?

R.R: Yes, that's right, there was Tony Martelli, Herb Guess, the Sullivan brothers and they were the ones who were doing most of the... shoving the beer and the liquor across.

N.F: They were very fast trips to Cuba.

R.R: Oh yes...well then there were some pretty big Customs Officers in there like...who was it Pattison, I don't know his first name... Frank Pattison...owned that big red building at the corner of Phipps Street and the Niagara Boulevard...where the Doll House is today... he was the biggest Customs Officer...so there was supposed to be a tunnel from his basement out to the river, whether or not that's the truth...I've looked for it, but I've never seen it, I could never find it...but it is possible...it could have been there.

N.F: All things are possible.

R.R: I don't know much more that I can tell you, probably after your gone I can think of lots.

N.F: There was a blacksmith down in the south end, do you remember a blacksmith being there?

R.R: On Princess and Waterloo, I do...but I don't know his name.

N.F: Would it have been Lou Douglas?

R.R: Yes, yes it could be...it could well be him yes...how I remember that was there was an old fellow by the name of Beam...and he

had a horse called Jessie...and I used to hire him to plow off the sidewalks and he took his horse down there to that blacksmith shop it was where the gasoline station is now, the Robo station...and then there was a garage put up there it was operated by Finch, okay...anyway...to tell you a good story about cleaning off sidewalks with horses I hired two coloured boys...their names were Bright, and the one fellow worked at night and he kept begging me to get a seat for the back of his plow so he could ride instead of walk all time...so I had a seat installed on the plow...and the next morning he came in with one foot frozen...and I said to him " Your going to have to go to the hospital, you are going to have to go to the doctor...why didn't you get off and walk for a while instead of riding?" well he said "What did you put the seat on there for if you wanted me to walk?" ha, ha, so that ended that...I took the seat off.

N.F: The things that can happen yes.

R.R: There was another fellow on Queen Street I can't recall...he had horses, Wally something...he was in with Lou Arch and they, and you know...I can't think of his name...anyway I used to hire him to do the sidewalks too...but they would work all night to get the sidewalk cleared off...old great big homemade snowplow, that's what they used.

N.F: That's quite an idea.

R.R: Yes, might be better if they had them today...wouldn't complain as much or cost as much.

N.F: How long did it take to get the streets paved...did Bridgeburg do it while it was still Bridgeburg?

R.R: No, no...Bridgeburg started to do it even before I started to work for the Town of Fort Erie...yes it would be 1928 in that time there.

N.F: About the same time the Peace Bridge opened?

R.R: I'd have been about thirteen or fourteen years old...yes, I remember the Peace Bridge...we used to go up and sit and watch them working on that...that was really something to watch what was going on there...but the streets came gradually...they put the water and

the sewer in first...and then they paved the streets over the top and I was living on Emerick Avenue then...of course after I got married I moved from there over to the Jarvis Street...I guess I got right close to where I had the job there, and I was pretty lucky to work...you were lucky to get a job then.

N.F: I can well imagine, it couldn't have been very good years.

R.R: It was tough times...real tough...Jarvis Street, they had dynamite they were blasting rock to put the sewer down into the rock...and that was really something to watch too...to watch that...the big railroad ties, they would cover the hole up with railroad ties and then dirt...and then they'd blow it...and then that would raise up a good three feet...and boom back down it came...a good two or three feet...we thought that was something.

N.F: It really would be.

R.R: They had big steam rollers...they used to keep the fires with coal... talking about coal...Bridgeburg had the biggest coal, soft coal pile that I saw...was up in Amagari...it extended from the front of Horton Steel on Jeanette Street right over to the Gilmore Road and it must have been thirty to forty feet high...now when it came winter... every chimney had black smoke...they had one policeman, who was supposed to be guarding that...yes everybody had soft coal fires...you could tell you know...coal smoke coming out of all these chimneys...and of course there were cattle cars...two big cattle detaining places where they used to hold the cattle for maybe over the weekend so the veterinary had a look at them before they were shipped over into the states...you know where Hart and Cooley is...well Hart and Cooley used to be Tutland and Bailey...before Hart and Cooley got there...and it was right in that section right along there that they had these big pens...and they'd have sheep or they'd have cows or whatever they were shipping into the states would be there...for years and years...and the other one was up where the Humane Society is today...right in that section there they had one there for the Michigan Central.

N.F: The railroads must have been busy.

R.R: It was going all the time...it was real busy...now there was a brick plant...used to be a brick plant here in Fort Erie at the end of Warren Street...Warren Street, do you know where Warren Street is...you know where the battery factory is now...Gould Battery, there's a little street goes up over the railroad tracks, most of the C.N.R. people go back in there to work...right at the end of that street was a big brick plant where they had all these kilns...and they made bricks...they were years in there...and the last thing I remember about was the big chimney that was left after a fire...and it was up in the air, and somebody bought it and was going to take it down and we all wondered how he would...he was ever going to take that brick, those bricks down without doing damage...well he took it down just like you would a tree...he went in there and he took bricks all out of one side of it...two rows of bricks...and he chinked it with croesote coated wood...gasoline and coal oil and all that mixed in...and he set it on fire, and it gradually burned and burned and the chimney just went right down where he wanted it to go.

N.F: Well imagine that.

R.R: Yes, now there is some other factory a plastic factory of some kind up in there now...and where the Horton Steel is today...when I was real young they had a marble plant there...it wasn't a steel company...they made marble, big slabs of marble...and where they took it from or where it went I don't know...it was a marble plant, there is lots of marble...I've dug it up...digging for sewers, pieces of it.

N.F: In the area.

R.R: In that area...lots of it.

N.F: Well I have never heard anything about that.

R.R: And of course there was lots of factories wanted to come into Fort Erie...and you know they were turned down by our city council...yes it was really something...it was a nice town...a quiet town...not much theiving and breaking in and all this kind of stuff...and we had good teachers in our schools...they used the strap of course...if you got out of hand...they took care of you...but I've seen a lot

of changes in Fort Erie...I've seen a lot of changes in Fort Erie.

N.F: At the time that you started for the town of Fort Erie, how big would the staff have been?

R.R: At the time when I started there was myself a foreman, and two or three labourers and a supervisor, and that was it...and then of course as the town amalgamated they picked up two or three from the other end...but if they wanted men they had men that were on relief and they would call and thirty-five cents an hour was pretty good pay.

N.F: Thirty-five cents an hour.

R.R: And no overtime, no compensation...no health benefits...thirty-five cents an hour for one hour or twenty hours whatever you wanted...for years it was like that...and that was any job you did...you see you were on call all the time...all the time I was supervisor I was on call twenty-four hours a day...seven days a week...and no getting away from it...until I took my vacation and then I was supposed to notify the town where I was going and how they could get a hold of me...oh, yes...I was in Lachine, Montreal and got called home I got called home for a break in a water main in front of the Irvin Air Chute...and the foreman I left behind me was going to take three lengths of fourteen inch pipe out...and renew three lengths of pipe...and Johnny Taylor was chairman of the water committee and he said just hold it and he called Lachine and said " Roy we need you home, you better come back home" so I came home the next day and I fixed it in fifteen minutes...that's right.

N.F: There is a lot of difference there, imagine the money that saved.

R.R: Oh yes, oh I saved the town unbelievable money...they don't even know.

N.F: I can well imagine that.

R.R: And at one time I went to court for them...for a million and a half dollars...the Irvin Air Chute was going to sue the Town of Fort Erie for a flooded basement...they had over a million dollars worth of silk on the floor and there was ten inches of water all over that silk...and it was ruined...it was absolutely ruined...and it was through

me the town got off the hook for that...and I won't go into details.

N.F: That is great though, that really is.

R.R: They forget, I mean that's water over the dam as far as they're concerned.

N.F: Very well said, yes.

R.R: Now I enjoy myself with my garden...my purple martins...and my fishing...I've got over forty martins out in that little house...its full right up...there's five on the wires there but they are all over the place here...if you could see them coming in at night...or you just walk out there...they'll be here in a minute, one makes a call and they all come...even if I change my hat, with a different hat on get rough with me...but they have a habit of hitting the window they must see straight through you know, they think that that is wide open and once in a while they damage themselves by hitting the windows...and there are hares and coons and deer and fox and everything in the back yard...it's just like a menagerie here.

N.F: I'll bet it can be, yes.

R.R: The bush out here extends from here over to Phipps Street, and there is the golf course...and that will all open out someday...I won't see it but it will be there...I've seen a lot of good things happen in Fort Erie, and I've seen a lot of things that I don't want to talk about in Fort Erie.

N.F: I don't blame you for that at all.

R.R: The river gives us a lot of enjoyment too...it is nice to live along here, it really is...and I have no regrets with the Town of Fort Erie... they looked after me and my family pretty good.

N.F: And you've looked after them pretty well also.

R.R: Yes I probably have...if I had it to do over again I probably would do it over again...I got myself in lots of arguments with our city council and mayors.

N.F: It would be impossible not to.

R.R: Oh yes, and we had Charlie Price from here too...he wasn't bad but he wanted to be the boss, you know, if he said " This is what I want done" well then we better see that we done it, that's all...

regardless...and Skippy Howe was Mayor at one time...I don't know if you remember him or not...he was a good mayor...one time we were snowplowing and we had a big army truck...Skippy bought it about 1945...just after the war anyway or just around in the war a really big bren carrier...you'd go around a corner and your front wheels would go around the corner but the back wheels would go in the ditch every time...you couldn't get around the corner without it, well I had worked about...I guess I went to work on Friday at about eight o'clock in the morning and I didn't see a bed till Tuesday that night...anyway this particular time I was snowplowing and there was a big snowbank up on High Street, north of Catherine...it must have been fifteen or twenty feet high...and I left it...I just, I don't know why I just left it, and when I got home and I got into bed, then the phone rang and it was Skippy Howe...Skippy said "Roy, I am in trouble" and of course I'm half asleep and I said "What's the trouble Skippy?" and he told me and I said "I didn't think...I thought that I'd get the main roads open first before, and the honest Skip, then I forgot to go back" but I said "But I'll do it, right away if you want me to" and he said "I wish you would there is somebody in there that has got to get to the hospital" or there is somebody has to have a baby or somebody needs coal or something was up...so I said "okay" well I had a helper who was Jim Bright a big coloured boy...and there was no heat in our truck, I had a lantern a railroad lantern for heat...anyway away we go...and I started at Bertie and came down High Street and I was doing about thirty or thirty-two miles an hour with this big monster of a truck...with a snowplow...and to this day I don't know what happened but I said to my helper I said "what do you think, do you think we can take her" and he said "I don't know, it might be froze on top or something" and to this day I don't know why...I pushed the clutch in and let the truck just feel it's way into that thing...and I got in there about ten feet...five little kids got up out of there...they had a fort right in there...if I hadn't have pushed the clutch in I would have killed everybody .

N.F: You sure would have.

R.R: I was so shaken up...that I backed out and went back home...and the Mayor called me again and he said " Roy you didn't finish the job" and I said " no and I'm not going to" and I said " I'll send a gang of men up there tomorrow and they can shovel it out" I told him " Skippy I'm shaking...I'm just shaking to death here" because when I first took the job I had snowplowing to do myself along with the foreman's job...when I first took it I said " I don't want it unless the town is going to be responsible for anything that happens" well that was baloney...they wouldn't be responsible...I was driving that truck, not anybody else...and another time my secretary Betty Haynes I pretty near took her head off...her and her sister, I came up along Robinson Street, winging back the snow and they had a fort there... and after the wing had gone over top of their fort they jumped up... so you can imagine the feelings...oh, I had some real feelings in that thing...that was one truck I can honestly say I drove that truck for eight years and it cost the town seventy-five cents for repairs... really I'm telling you the truth...that's the only repairs I had on that truck...and it was the rotor inside the distributor...I broke it and I bought another one...for seventy-five cents.

N.F: Isn't that something.

R.R: Now I used to put forty cement blocks...big cement blocks...on the back of it for weight...and the reason I put it on...at first I put sand on there and it froze...and we got into a little bit of trouble...and we had to unload that to get out of the trouble...and no sir...well I'll just tell what I have done with it...at one time there was so much snow in Fort Erie that Benner's run out of coal...and the closest place that they could spot a car of coal was the Pratt and Lambert building where they make the paint...I took the snowplow...and plowed off the railroad track...from Benner's coal dock to Pratt and Lambert's to that coal car...turned the army truck around...and pulled that car down so the people in Fort Erie could have coal.

N.F: Really.

R.R: Yes I did...and I went in and got Art Wale...who had a team of horses...and was delivering coal with his horses he got the horses

stuck up to their bellies...an Albany Street and I had to go in with a gang of men and the snowplow and get him out of there...I was three weeks getting into the city dump...I was three weeks with forty men and a snowplow...getting in from the subway into the back of the Greenwood...and into the dump...three weeks.

N.F: Imagine that, three weeks.

R.R: Shovelling snow...someplace I've got pictures of me standing on the snow...looking down at my snowplow.

N.F: When people say we used to have bad winters they are not kidding.

R.R: No, no we've had some dillies...and then is when we would get a broken water main...when you couldn't find the valves...or you couldn't do this, or you couldn't do that...but we had to be out there and fix it...it didn't make any difference.

N.F: You'd have to go through all that.

R.R: Well, when I was foreman I had the snowplowing to do...the men to look after, their time to keep...I was time-keeper and everything else...all at the same time...all this in one day's work...and I never thought nothing of it...you know, that was it...we done it...now they have unions...one guy is a truck driver and he don't do nothing else...another guy stands with a shovel...and he's supposed to be a labourer, and somebody is on the backhoe...and somebody else is on something else...somebody is on the tamper...oh my goodness.

N.F: Everybody has a job.

R.R: Yes...but Fort Erie was a nice place, and is a nice place to live, I don't care what anybody says...I go to the town meetings...once in a while I go.

N.F: I can imagine you hear some amazing things at those.

R.R: Yes I do...we had a fellow who was building sidewalks one time...I can't think of the contractor's name...and he kept bringing in this stone dust...I said to him "What are you going to do with that?" and he said "build sidewalks...you mix that with cement and it makes the best sidewalk you ever had" he said, well I called Johnny Taylor and I told Johnny Taylor I said, "now look I'm not a cement man and I don't possess to be one...but I know that is not right", so I

forget how many thousands of dollars the town paid him...and the next year we had to...well I guess we're still ripping those sidewalks out and putting new ones in...it was a disgrace...a terrible disgrace, and yet they'd hire that contractor back.

N.F: Is that right?

R.R: Oh, yes there's nothing you can do...no I've had lots of fun...I've had lots of fun with the men then some stories if they could be told...they'd make you laugh for a couple of hours I'd guess... one time I had a broken water main...down in the south end and I came to work all ready to get going on this water main...and my two key men were gone...so I called home for them, and they weren't home they hadn't been home all night...so I thought that was funny... missing persons...so I called the police department and I got a hold of Mr. Kent, Walter Kent...and he said "yes I know where they are", and I said "would you tell me Walter where they are?" and he said "they are in jail", "they're in jail" I said, "well I have got to have them" and he said "well you can't have them they're locked up...and I can't let them out", and I said "Walter I have to have those men... I have to have that main fixed" he said "well I'm sorry Roy, I can't let you have the men" "well I'm going to have to go over your head, I've got to have them" so I went over his head and I called and next thing you know the phone rang and it was Walter Kent...and he said "okay Roy come and get them, but you've got to bring them back tonight" so I said "I'll do that...after five o'clock I'll bring them back" and I brought them back for three nights...but I got that main fixed...I won't name their names or anything but...those are the kinds of things that I had to put up with...and of course I had people come to me for jobs...and at one time I couldn't hire anybody but anybody that lived in Fort Erie...they just wouldn't let me and now they hire them for Timbaktu...but I had a fellow one time come that... he wore a big knife...a big knife, I think it was made out of a sword, and I had him come in my office and I shut the door, and I said "what is the knife for?" and he said "for my protection" and I said "your protection...who's after you?" and he said "well,

you never know...maybe I'll get down in the ditch or something and I can't get out and I'll have to dig my way out...and I said "if you are down in the ditch long enough to dig your way out...you are not coming out" ha, ha so I said to him, I said "look, you like your job here?" and he said "yes I do" and I said "well I like you too... but I'll tell you I don't like your knife, I want you to take the knife and take it home and put it in a safe place and don't be wearing it anymore" I said "for one thing it's against the law to wear that knife concealed...and I assume that it is too long a knife anyway for you to be carrying" well his father-in-law was the next person I had to contend with and he wanted to know what was up and everything else...and he got real mad and he was going to go to the council and he was going to go to the mayor and I said "I'll tell you what... what do you say you and I take a walk over to the police station...and we'll straighten this whole thing up at the police station" and he said "no never mind...forget it" but I had the knife taken home and the fellow came back to work and so on...everything worked out pretty good...we've had some good times and we've had some real trying times, you know.

N.F: A lot of long days.

R.R: Now they have things organized you know, two engineers...and five superintendents...oh yes we have to have two engineers, one is not enough...and we have a superintendent, a roads superintendent and now they are advertising for another one and they also have I don't know five or six foremen...one forman for about every two men I guess...but I guess it is changing times.

N.F: Things just seem to be going in that direction.

R.R: And of course the big computer we have got...the only thing that bothers me is the taxes going up all the time...I don't agree with that...when I first moved down here where I am on the Niagara Boulevard...my taxes were five hundred dollars and now they are eighteen hundred dollars...and that is only ten years so what are they going to be in another ten years if I live that long.

N.F: They have increased that much?

R.R: And somebody told me the other day that they are going to double next year...and if they keep hiring what they are hiring they are going to double...they'll have to because the salaries have to come from someplace...so you have a very nice library up there, I know that is a beautiful building ...of course you know I play Santa Claus, in the library and other places...I enjoy that more than anything.

N.F: That is a marvelous idea.

R.R: I have arthritis in both knees this year I don't know how long I'm going to be playing Santa Claus but anyhow I've had lots of fun doing that, yes I enjoy that very much...and of course Gail, our daughter was Centennial Queen in 1957...that was a highlight of my life there... that was definitely one of them...and Bob he got his master plumber and now he is working for the school board, and doing very well.

N.F: That was a huge parade in 1957.

R.R: Yes it was I got some pictures of her and the parade too, yes it was huge that's for sure...and that's about all I can tell you sir.

N.F: Thank you very much for the interview, and you have told me a lot.